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ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for improving the behavior of seventh and eighth grade students with learning disabilities in a self-contained classroom setting. Analysis of probable causes revealed that students demonstrated a lack of problem-solving skills, showed a low frustration tolerance, and exhibited poor self-concepts. Two major categories of intervention were selected: (1) strategies to improve social skills, and (2) an incentive program designed to increase motivation and improve self-concept. Intervention activities involved providing social skills training for two class periods per week, having students use social skills checklists and reflective journal writing to identify their needs for behavior change, implementation of a token economy incentive program, and special field trips such as an outdoor adventure field trip emphasizing cooperative working towards specific goals. The intervention resulted in decreases in the numbers of disruptive behaviors, suspensions, and referrals. Contains 24 references. (DB)

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IMPROVING STUDENT BEHAVIOR

by

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and
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master's of Arts in Education

Saint Xavier University - IRI
Field-Based Master's Program

Action Research Proposal
Site: Rockford, IL
Submitted: April, 1994

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Abstract

AUTHOR: Jan Gilbert, Pamela Green SITE: Rockford II
DATE: April, 1994

TITLE: Improving the Behavior of Self-Contained Learning Disabled Students Through Social Skills Training and Incentive Program Implementation

ABSTRACT: This report describes a program for improving the behavior of seventh and eighth grade self-contained learning disabled students in a growing urban, industrial community, located in northern Illinois. The problem was originally noted by the teachers of the self-contained learning disabilities classes, who found that due to high levels of disruptive behavior, the classroom climate was becoming non-conducive to learning. A review of disciplinary referral records and teacher observation confirmed the problem.

Analysis of the probable cause data revealed that students demonstrated a lack of problem solving skills and experienced low frustration tolerance. In addition, students appeared to exhibit low self-concepts.

Analysis of the problem setting, combined with solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, resulted in the selection of two major categories of intervention: strategies to improve social skills, and an incentive program designed to increase motivation and improve self-concept. All strategic solutions were related to curriculum development or changes in teaching practice

All symptoms of the original problem were reduced as projected: the level of disruptive behavior decreased, the number of suspensions and referrals decreased, and the students' use of social skills increased

Chapter 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND COMMUNITY BACKGROUND

General Statement of Problem

The learning disabled students in the self-contained classes at Flinn Middle School exhibit high levels of disruptive behavior in the school setting, as evidenced by the number of teacher referrals, in school suspensions, and out of school suspensions.

Immediate Problem Context

Flinn Middle School is a two story building housing approximately 1000 seventh and eighth grade students. The facilities include academic classrooms, which are clustered together according to subject, a library, cafeteria, auditorium, elevator, and several physical education stations. There are also three office areas: the main office, student office, and counseling office. The academic classes offered are completely untracked and grouped heterogeneously.

The ethnic/racial composition of the student body is: 72.4 percent Caucasion, 19.8 percent African-American, 6.4 percent Hispanic, 1.1 percent Asian, and 0.3 percent Native American. Twenty-five percent of the students are low income and 0.2 percent are limited English proficient. The student mobility rate is 16.2 percent. The student population is divided into seven academic teams of approximately 150 students per team. There are three

seventh grade teams, three eighth grade teams, and one split seven/eight team. Each team consists of four academic teachers (math, English, science, and history), a physical education teacher, and a special education consultant. The student male/female ratio is approximately equal.

The Flinn staff consists of two administrators, a principal and assistant principal. There are 73 certified staff, 28 male and 45 female. Sixty-three percent hold a master's degree or beyond. The racial balance is 94 percent majority and 6 percent minority. In addition to the teaching staff, Flinn has a full-time nurse, librarian, and three counselors. There are several part-time positions such as a social worker, home/school counselor, psychologist, and two office aides. Also, there are two secretaries, two full-time office aides, and one office manager. A large cafeteria staff and small custodial staff exist along with the presence of one to two off duty police officers daily.

Although Flinn houses no alternative programs, there are a number of support services available to the students. One such service is a grant program focusing on students at risk of dropping out of school. This program is staffed by one full-time counselor and five teachers each teaching one section. Also, an in-school suspension program exists which is staffed by one full-time coordinator. A number of support groups are offered for various issues such as grief counseling, Alateen, Children of Alcoholics, drug awareness and prevention, peer mediation, and natural

helpers. A liason from Rosecrance addiction center works with the Flinn students two days per week. There are also many different student activities available such as intramural sports, student council, study club, and Boys Club sponsored sports. Flinn is currently developing a Renaissance program and maintains a partnership with the Weyerhauser Corporation.

An extensive special education program exists including two self-contained classes serving behavior disordered students, two self-contained classes serving learning disabled students, three teachers for LD/BD resource students. The students in the self-contained learning disabilities program are mainstreamed for physical education and two electives, spending the remainder of their day alternating between the two SCLD teachers. The resource teachers are assigned to two teams each and serve as consultants to the regular teachers. Each team has approximately twelve LD/BD resource students in it.

The Surrounding Community

Rockford, the second largest city in Illinois, is located along the Rock River in north-central Illinois, 14 miles from the Wisconsin border to the north, 75 miles from Chicago to the southeast, and 70 miles from Iowa to the west. The city covers a 50 square mile area. Rockford is an urban industrial community with high employment concentrations in machining, metal-working, and

transportation equipment manufacturing. The city has a rising unemployment rate which is currently at 9.2 percent. The population of the community is approximately 190,000. There are four public middle schools, four high schools, and 37 elementary schools. In addition to the public schools, there are 26 private elementary schools and ten private high schools. Also, there are several higher level education facilities such as a junior college and nursing college.

Recently, the community has become more involved in school district affairs. The school board is relatively new, and a new superintendent came to the district in January of 1994. Prior to his arrival, the district operated under the authority of a temporary superintendent for a period of one and one-half years. The district is currently involved in a lawsuit with the community regarding alleged discrimination against minority students. A segment of the community is charging the school system with maintaining a history of intentional discrimination. The district has been ordered to provide equality in educational opportunity for all students and to desegregate schools. The order to desegregate has resulted in over 80 percent of the district's 27,000 students being bused. Classes within schools are also under court order to be racially balanced. Various community task forces have been formed to address these issues. Also, many business groups have joined forces to advise school leaders on financial issues. There are

several school/business partnerships which have been formed to provide money and volunteer help in the schools.

Regional and National Context of Problem

In the second Phi Delta Kappa Poll of teachers' attitudes toward the public schools as reported by Elam (1989), twenty-five percent of teachers in the nation chose lack of discipline as the biggest problem that public schools must deal with. Discipline problems ranked fourth on the list preceded only by lack of parental support, lack of financial support, and truancy. Also, lack of respect for teachers and other students ranked ninth in the list of 27 items. When asked how serious a problem the teachers felt discipline was in their schools, 50 percent chose fairly serious to very serious. Fifty-seven percent of the teachers polled reported behavior that disrupts class occurs most of the time. Interestingly, discipline problems in the schools was highly rated as one of the three main reasons why teachers are leaving their jobs.

Hall(1988) reported on a recent survey which indicated that 29 percent of public school teachers had seriously considered leaving the profession because of discipline problems. Fourteen percent reported that student behavior greatly interfered with teaching; 27 percent reported that it greatly interfered with learning; and 44 percent reported that there were more disruptive behaviors in schools in 1986-87 than there were five years earlier.

In a report by Reed and Busby(1987) middle school teachers identified specific problems they have in their classrooms. The most serious problems were cited as student lack of motivation, student lack of cooperation with rules, student inattentiveness, and student talk at inappropriate times.

Learning disabled students appear to be at a higher risk than their regular education peers for engaging in antisocial activities. Bryan, Pearl, and Fallon (1989) attempted to replicate other studies showing that learning disabled students are easily influenced by peers to take part in antisocial activities. Their findings indicate that vulnerability to peer pressure should be considered in assessment and the provision of social skills development should be considered as an intervention.

While teachers and parents agree that discipline problems are one of the largest concerns in schools, learning disabled (L.D.) students appear to be at an even higher risk for these problems than are non-special education students. Learning disabled students are easily affected negatively by peer pressure, and display many behaviors that may affect their self-esteem and confidence. Little learning can take place in a classroom where the teacher spends more time correcting misbehavior than teaching.

Chapter 2

PROBLEM EVIDENCE AND PROBABLE CAUSE

Problem Background

As pointed out in Chapter 1, the disruptive behavior of many self-contained learning disabled students has been of concern to classroom teachers, administrators, and parents. This concern has focused the attention of researchers on the causes and remediations for the problem. Various efforts have been undertaken at the middle school level to address these concerns both by school districts and individual schools. Behavioral programs such as assertive discipline, token economies, and in-school suspension have been developed to help students modify and improve their own behavior.

Locally, self-contained classes for learning disabled students have different structures. Some students are self-contained within a special education department, but may have several different teachers within the day. Students that require more structure may be in the same classroom with one teacher for the majority of the day. The teachers usually use one or more of the behavior intervention models within the learning disabilities program.

A district wide Renaissance program was instituted in August of 1991. Essentially, Renaissance is a program of extrinsic incentives, rewards, and recognition designed to

address the problems of low self-esteem, low grade point averages, poor attendance, and tardiness. Under this program, all students are eligible to earn incentives at the end of each quarter.

Each middle school provides various support groups for students exhibiting characteristics of low self-esteem which focus on developing appropriate social skills. However, self-contained L.D. students are excluded from these programs, as group facilitators believe that these students already receive sufficient support from their special education program.

In addition to a district-wide discipline policy, each school maintains a discipline committee which focuses on behavior problems specific to each school. This committee tends to focus on disruptive behavior in unstructured areas, such as the hallways and cafeteria, with classroom policies being left mainly to the discretion of individual teachers.

Problem Evidence

Both subjective and objective means were used to document the high levels disruptive behavior of the self-contained learning disabled students. A review of disciplinary records from the 1992-93 school year revealed four major areas of concern: insubordination, disruptive behavior, truancy, and fighting.

Table 1

The Number of Disciplinary Referrals Received by Self-Contained Learning Disabled Students Sept. 1992 through June 1993

TYPE OF REFERRAL	NUMBER	PERCENT
Insubordination	22	31
Disruptive behavior	17	24
Truancy	9	13
Fighting	8	11
Verbal abuse of staff	7	10
Physical assault of a student	3	4
Gang indicia	2	3
Alcohol/Drugs	1	1
Smoking	1	1
Vandalism	1	1
Physical assault of staff	1	1

N=13

The data shown in Table 1 represent behaviors significantly more severe than those which were tallied by the classroom aides. Insubordination is described as the refusal to comply with assigned consequences. Disruptive behavior includes talking out, talking back to a teacher, being out of seat, making noise, play fighting, and arguing. Truancy is defined as an unexcused absence of one or more class periods. Fighting is considered physical contact with intent to cause harm. The data indicate insubordination and disruptive behavior to be significant areas of concern, as 55 percent of the referrals occured in these categories. It should be noted that of the thirteen students included in the sample in table 1, five received no referrals.

Table 2

The Number of Suspensions Received by
Self-Contained LD Students
Sept. 1992 to June 1993

TYPE OF SUSPENSION	NUMBER
In classroom	16
In school	32
Out of school	28

N=13

The data shown in Table 2 describes the number of suspensions received by the self-contained LD students. It should be noted of the thirteen students in the program, eight received no suspensions. This data is significant because numerous interventions have been attempted before the suspension alternatives are utilized. Considering that the data represent only five students, these numbers are cause for concern.

Classroom aides tallied targeted classroom behaviors, including inappropriately talking out, being out of seat, and making noises. Three objective measures were used. Self-assessment checklists determined student perception of their own behavior. Peer assessment and teacher assessment checklists provided additional perceptions of the problem. Anecdotal records were kept and reviewed to determine which specific students needed the most help to improve their behavior. A review of report cards verified that the inappropriate behavior was affecting school achievement.

Table 3

The Instances of Misbehavior by the Self-Contained Learning Disabled Students as Tallied By the Classroom Aides During Sept. 1993

TYPE OF BEHAVIOR	NUMBER
Tapping on desk	80
Noises	23
Talking out	104
Tardy	13
Rudeness	17
Interrupting	23
Not turning in an assignment	78
Fake fighting	8
Defiance/Direct Disobedience	11
Not on task	15
Lacking necessary materials	66
Out of seat without permission	12

N=22

The data in Table 3 indicate a high level of inappropriate behavior occurring within the classroom. These behaviors cause frequent disruption of the classroom environment resulting in an inordinate amount of teaching time being spent on discipline. It should be noted that all students are represented in the above data.

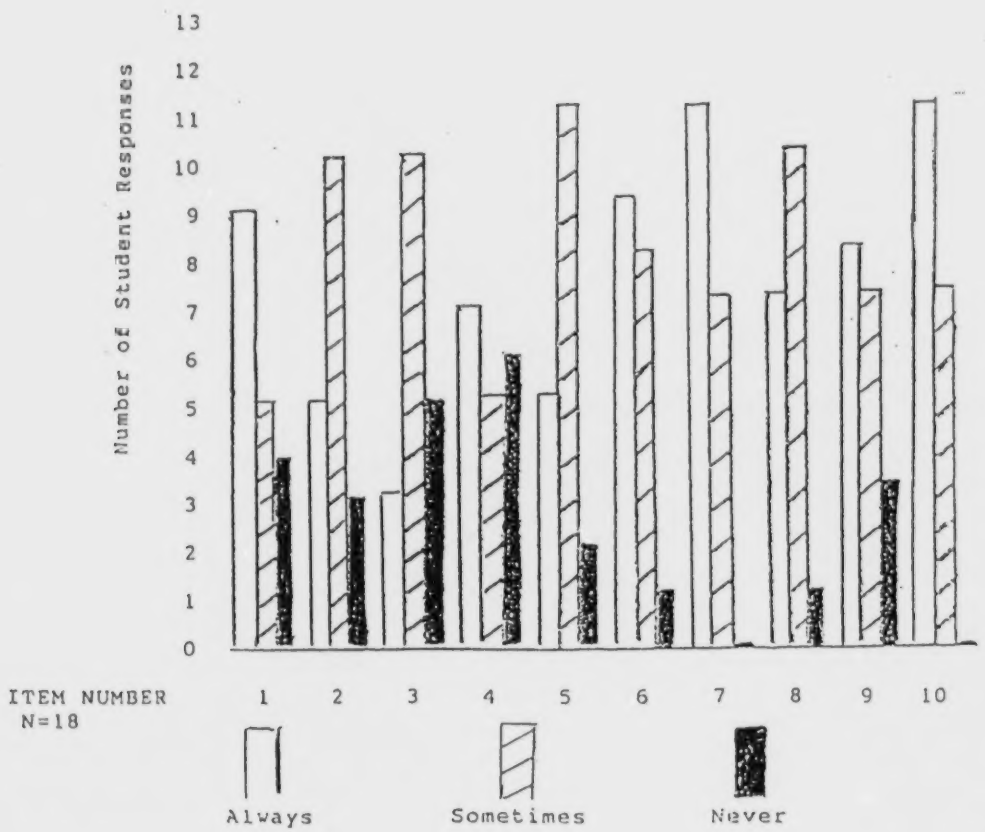
Probable Causes of Problem

Probable cause data was gathered from a variety of sources. Effects of family upbringing, values and support were documented by interviews with the students and by parent conferences and phone contacts. The rate of follow-through by parents was documented.

A sample of eighteen students from the self-contained learning disabilities classes was administered a social skills self-assessment questionnaire (Appendix A). The intent of the questionnaire was to determine students' perceptions of their own behavior and social skills competency and their perception of classroom climate. This data was then compared to data collected by observation of student behavior, a review of disciplinary records, and teacher responses to social skills checklists (Appendix B).

Table 4

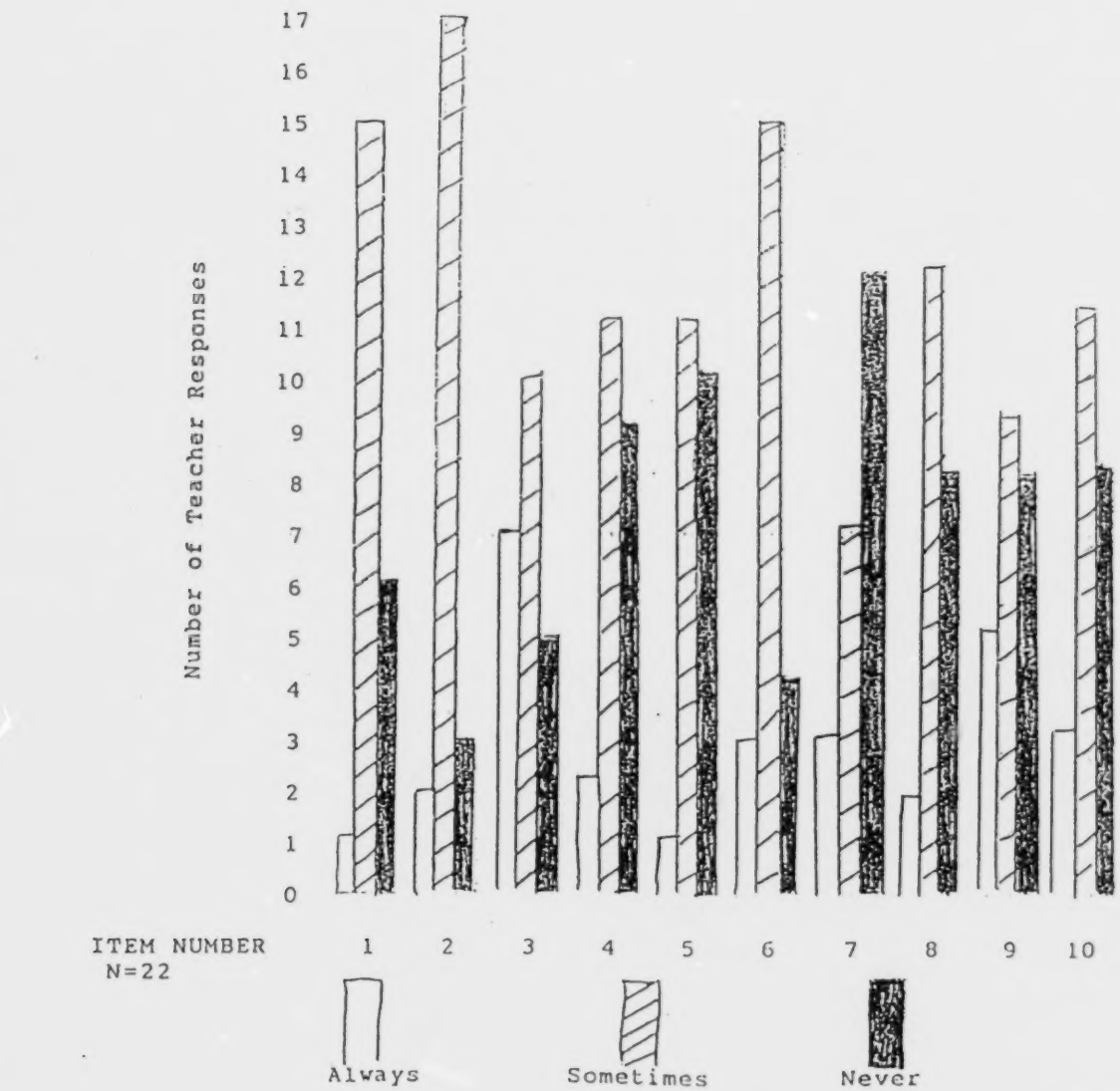
Responses to Student Self-Assessment
Survey of Social Skills
SEPT. 1993



As shown in Table 4, the majority of the students feel their behavior is in the always appropriate or sometimes appropriate range. This would indicate that students believe their behavior to be proper most of the time.

Table 5

Teacher Responses to Student Assessment
Survey of Social Skills
SEPT. 1993



In Table 5, teachers rate students' behavior to be far less acceptable than students' perception of the same behavior, with the majority of teacher responses falling in the sometimes appropriate and never appropriate ranges.

The discrepancy between student and teacher assessment indicates that the students do not always have realistic perceptions of their behavior.

A summary of probable cause data gathered from the problem site permitted the following conclusions: students often had accurate perceptions of their social competence when filling out self-report checklists; students tended not to have accurate pictures of their own behavior and social skills competency, believing they behaved more appropriately than observations indicated.

Probable cause data from the literature indicated a strong relationship between self-concept and school performance. Mendler(1992) stated that kids who are discipline problems often have a history of failure. There is a powerful relationship between poor academic performance and poor behavior. This causes damage to self-esteem, and many kids eventually withdraw or act-out in protest.

> Next to the home, school is the most important force in shaping and maintaining the child's self-concept, and there is evidence that the frustrations of repeated school failure lead to emotional and behavioral problems in children (Schwyhart,1967, p.121).

Other researchers have also noted this connection. Gorrell (1990), Bloom (1976), Branch, Danico and Purkey (1977) and Burns (1979) agreed that it is generally accepted that positive self-concepts are associated with higher levels of

student performance and achievement. Clark, Clemes, and Bean(1982) stated we tend to behave according to how we view ourselves and our sense of self-esteem. The behavior, in turn, usually validates the self-view we already have. With a negative self-image and low self-esteem, people feel inadequate, think of themselves as being unable to perform and thus often block opportunities to behave successfully.

Researchers indicate a variety of factors which influence a child to have lowered self-esteem. Mendler(1992) stated that the social factors that negatively affect a child's self-esteem, decision-making, and behavior are well documented: alcoholic parents, peer pressures, the media, drug abuse, kids rearing each other, preoccupied parents, poverty, and homelessness. According to statistics presented at the Renaissance Foundation Convention (1993), the kind of student we are trying to teach in the 1990's has a great many obstacles to face.

---Over 50 percent are dealing with a family unit that is falling apart in front of their eyes (divorce).

---25 percent of teenage girls, starting at 12, will experience an unwanted pregnancy.

---One student in ten will be contemplating suicide as a way to escape their problems.

---One student in six will wake up with an alcohol-induced hangover at least once a week and is an alcoholic.

---One student in six is chemically dependent on or using a mind-altering drug.

---27 percent of students (age 10-18) live in poor or near poor families.

---One in five white adolescents grows up in a one-parent family. 50 percent of black and 30 percent of Hispanic adolescents live in one-parent families.

---Since 1980, physical abuse is up 58 percent, sexual abuse is up 214 percent, and emotional abuse is up 33 percent.

We must begin with an understanding of the problems facing children. Most important, we must realize that social and economic factors have battered down certain children and increased the likelihood that they will fail and that they will behave in ways that we deplore.

A second probable cause noted in the literature was the lack of social skills. Bryan (1976) and Bryan, Wheeler, Feelan, and Hanek (1976) have indicated a high degree of correlation between learning disabilities and deficits in social functioning. Studies have shown that the higher an individual's level of intellectual functioning, the higher the level of social functioning. The relationship between intellectual functioning and social skill usage is apparent, especially the ability to learn and use more sophisticated social skills (Blackbourn, 1989). In a study comparing the social competence of handicapped and nonhandicapped adolescents, Ritter(1989) found that the learning disabled

adolescents exhibited significantly poorer social competence and significantly greater behavior problems than nonhandicapped youth of the same age and gender.

Chapter 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Review of the Literature

Analysis of probable cause data suggested reasons related to inaccurate student perception of appropriate behavior, poor understanding of appropriate social interactions, and the absence of a relationship between the teaching of social skills and the acquiring and demonstration of appropriate behavior and social skills. In addition to these data, research literature suggested the following probable causes: insufficient curricular time devoted to social and problem solving skills, low student motivation as a result of repeated academic and social failure causing a lack of self-esteem, and adolescent peer pressure.

The literature search for solution strategies was organized as suggested by these probable cause data. Analysis of these data suggested that a series of questions related to curricular design, learner behavior, and teacher behavior should be addressed.

The questions related curricular design included:
1) What should the frequency of social skills activities be, in order for social skills competency to occur?
2) Which activities will most positively affect social

skills development? 3) How should these activities be presented to maximize acquisition and generalization? 4) What curricular content and processes facilitate student problem solving abilities?

The questions related to the learner were primarily ones of motivation: 1) What factors positively or negatively impact on behavior? 2) How are attitudes and values positively influenced towards improving behavior? 3) What factors influence intrinsic and extrinsic motivation?

Teacher behavior questions included: 1) What strategies should teachers employ which will most positively affect self-esteem? 2) How can teachers affect student motivation levels? 3) How can teachers most effectively use incentives? 4) Which teaching strategies contribute to student problem solving abilities? 5) Which teaching strategies contribute to student acquistion of appropriate social skills?

These questions suggested that appropriate categories for the literature search should include: self-esteem development, middle school behavior programs, curricular design, adolescent development, motivation, higher order thinking skills, and social skills development.

Many researchers expressed the opinion that teachers have a responsibility to their students in helping to build their self-esteems. Sparks and Rye (1990) stated that classroom teachers have the opportunity to help students experience success in school. Therefore, teachers must

assume responsibility for both cognitive and affective development in their curriculum planning and teaching transactions. Canter(1989) goes so far as to say that many students who are categorized as behavior problems would not be so labeled if their teachers had taught them how to behave appropriately in the classroom and had raised their self-esteem.

A variety of studies have stressed the importance of teaching social skills in the classroom. Kohn(1991) states it is sometimes said that moral concerns and social skills ought to be taught in the home. The problem is that such instruction, along with nurturance and warmth, someone to model altruism, opportunities to practice caring for others, and so forth, is not to be found in all homes. The school may need to provide what some children will not otherwise get. He also believes that with proper planning, it is possible to integrate prosocial lessons into the regular curriculum. One way that Kohn(1991) believes that this can be achieved is through the use of cooperative learning activities. He believes that by creating interdependence and a built-in incentive to help, cooperative learning promotes prosocial behavior. Kohn(1991) also describes the importance of children being included in the process of developing the classroom rules. He states that children are more likely to follow rules that they have helped to create than rules dictated to them. Mendler(1992) also supports this theory.

In a study done by Stiliadis and Wiener(1989), one theory implicated in the etiology of peer difficulties in children with learning disabilities is that perceptual processing deficits that interfere with their acquisition of academic skills transfer to the social realm and interfere with successful social functioning. The social perceptual deficits make it difficult for children with learning disabilities to accurately "read" and/or interpret critical social cues and consequently understand the complexities of social situations(Lerner,1981). In response, special educators have advocated curricular changes to include training children with learning disabilities in social perception, and a variety of social perception packages have been developed to alleviate their social perceptual skills.

The research on the issue regarding the use of incentives to change classroom behavior was quite extensive. Although several studies expressed a negative view of incentive usage, there were many researchers who provided support for the idea. Chance(1992) ties the idea of incentives to the notion of reinforcement. He states that to reinforce means to strengthen and among learning researchers, reinforcement refers to a procedure for strengthening behavior (that is, making it likely to be repeated) by providing certain kinds of consequences. These consequences, called reinforcers, are usually events or things a person willingly seeks out. Hundreds of experimental studies have demonstrated that systematic use of reinforcement can improve both classroom conduct and

the rate of learning. Teachers acknowledge that increased use of reinforcement means fewer discipline problems and a much faster rate of learning(Chance, 1992). Chance(1993) states that people learn best in a responsive environment. Teachers who praise or otherwise reward student performance provide such an environment. He further states that if a child does not have the basic skills to discover the intrinsic satisfaction of complex activities such as reading, the use of extrinsic rewards may be required to equip him with these skills.

Mendler(1992) specifically identifies the need for the use of reinforcers with behaviorally disordered students.

> In my work with behaviorally disordered youth, a combination of obedience and responsibility methods is needed for growth and change to occur. Conventional behavioral methods which are obedience-oriented ("Do as I say and you will be rewarded or punished") are often required in the early stages for such youth to feel a sense of safety and security (someone else will put controls to the impulses which I cannot).

A summary of the literature which addressed the questions related to curricular design, suggested the following strategies:

1) Social skills activities must be presented more often to LD students in order for social skills to be acquired.

2) Social skills should be practiced in real-life environments as often as possible.

3) Incentive programs must be designed carefully and implemented consistently.

4) Cooperative activities should be included as often as possible to allow the use of social skills.

The implications of these solution strategies for the for the discrepancy setting were varied. Feedback to the student had to be improved. The use of an incentive program led to the need for financial support for tangible rewards. Sources of financial assistance aside from the teachers needed to be investigated. The suggestion to implement cooperative learning had implications for both students and staff. A balance of fun and work had to be negotiated. Some staff inservice training was also anticipated in order to upgrade knowledge levels.

Project Outcomes

The terminal objective of this problem intervention was related to the disciplinary data presented in Chapter 2. This data indicated that the existing level of disruptive behavior was detrimental to classroom climate. Probable cause data, presented in the latter part of chapter 2, and solution strategies presented in the first part of this chapter suggested the need for improving social skills for implementation of teaching strategies to raise student motivation levels. Therefore:

> As a result of the implementation of a social skills curriculum, during the period of September 1993 to March 1994, the self-contained learning disabled students will decrease their level of disruptive behavior to the extent that the number of referrals will decrease by 30 percent, the number of in-school suspensions will decrease by 20 percent, the number of out-of-school suspensions will decrease by 30 percent, and the amount of teacher time spent redirecting students will decrease by 30 percent, as measured by school records and teacher observation.

In order to accomplish the terminal objective, the following intermediate objectives defined the major strategic procedures proposed for problem resolution.

1) As a result of the implementation of a social skills curriculum, occurring during September 1993 to March 1994, the self-contained learning disabled students will receive social skills training two class periods per week as reflected by teacher lesson plans.

2) As a result of the use of social skills checklists and reflective journal writing activities, the students will identify their need for behavior improvement through the use of self-assessment on a daily basis.

3) As the result of a planning session, teachers will develop an incentive program designed to motivate improved student behavior.

4) As a result of a planning session between the administration and the teachers of the self-contained learning disabilities classes, strategies for dealing with student misbehavior will be developed.

5) As a result of community field trips, students will have the opportunity to demonstrate and practice the learned social skills.

Proposal Solution Components

The approaches used to improved self-contained learning disabled students' behavior fell into two categories: strategies to improve social skills, and an incentive program designed to increase motivation and improve self-concept. These approaches related to the terminal objective in that they attempted to improve student behavior by increasing the self-esteem of the students and increasing motivation.

Chapter 4

ACTION PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTING THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Description of Problem Resolution Activities

The action plan is designed to address two major solution components: development of social skills curriculum, and implementation of incentive-based behavior management system.

The curriculum development phase of the plan will begin in the summer of 1993 with a meeting of the three teachers of the self-contained learning disabilities program. Using data collected by review of disciplinary records, the teachers will design a social skills program which will be incorporated into the existing curriculum in the fall of 1993. This group will take complete responsibility for the development and delivery of the program.

The implementation phase of the behavior management system will begin with the identification of potential incentives and the establishment of a classroom management system. The purpose of this component is to motivate students to more frequently exhibit appropriate social skills in the school setting.

The implementation plan is presented below in outline form.

1. Meet with administration
   A. Who: Principal, Assistant Principal, Teachers of the self-contained learning disabilities program, Special Education department head
   B. What: Explain project and develop plan to deal with inappropriate student behavior
   C. When: Before the start of the 1993 school year
2. Develop incentive program
   A. Who: Teachers of the self-contained learning disabilities program
   B. What: Brainstorm list of possible incentives, seek sources of potential incentive donors
   C. When: Ongoing
   D. Why: To increase student motivation and improve behavior
3. Consult with other special education teachers in building and district
   A. Who: Teachers of the self-contained learning disabilities classes and various other special education teachers
   B. What: Identify social skills programs previously used by other special education teachers
   C. When: Prior to program implementation

4. Develop social skills activities

   A. Who: Teachers of the self-contained learning disabilities classes

   B. What: Develop a social skills training program which addresses the issues of improving problem solving skills, improving peer and authority relationships, increasing frustration tolerance, and increasing self-control; develop visual aids for classroom

   C. When: Summer of 1993

5. Revise and edit checklists and journal ideas

   A. Who: Teachers of the self-contained learning disabilities classes

   B. What: Finalize social skills checklists and coordinate journal ideas to be used throughout the project

   C. When: Before the start of the 1993 school year

6. Plan field trips

   A. Who: Teachers of the self-contained learning disabilities classes

   B. What: Explore field trip possibilities, including sites offering team building activities, and sites which encourage students to demonstrate acquired social skills

   C. When: Fall of 1993

Methods of Assessment

A variety of data collection methods will be used in order to assess the effects of the intervention.

Improvement in behavior will be measured through teacher observation, incentive program documentation, and student office referral records. The data from the March, 1994, referral records will be compared with that of the January, 1993, referral records.

Improvement in social skills will be documented through teacher, student, and peer checklists, and through teacher observation. Social skills checklists will be administered three times during implementation, and the results will be compared.

Chapter 5

EVALUATION OF RESULTS AND PROCESS

Implementation History

The terminal objective of the intervention address the high levels of disruptive behavior and the need to improve the social skills of the learning disabled students in the self-contained classroom. Student responses to a self-assessment social skills checklist compared to observation of student behavior and a review of disciplinary records indicated a need for remediation. Therefore, the terminal objective stated:

> As a result of the implementation of a social skills curriculum, during the period of September, 1993, to March, 1994, the self-contained learning disabled students will decrease the level of their disruptive behavior to the extent that the number of referrals will decrease by 30 percent, the number of in-school suspensions will decrease by 20 percent, the number of out-of-school suspensions will decrease by 30 percent, and the amount of teacher time spent redirecting students will decrease by 30 percent, as measured by school records and teacher observation.

The development of a curricular component to address the lack of social skills in the self-contained learning disabled student population began with a review of disciplinary records. This activity took place during the summer of 1993. Several meetings of the three teachers of

the self-contained learning disabilities program took place in order to design a social skills program.

In addition, these teachers met with building administration to explain the project and develop a plan to deal with inappropriate student behavior. This meeting took place just prior to the 1993 school year. It was decided that the administration would inform the teachers when their students were sent to the office and that the teachers would be included in all disciplinary conferences and have input into consequences assigned.

The social skills program had two components; a social skills curriculum and an incentive based behavior management system. The social skills curriculum was designed to address the issues of improving problem solving skills, improving peer and authority relationships, increasing frustration tolerance, and increasing self-control. A variety of techniques were used to accomplish these objectives. Social skills lessons were incorporated into the existing curriculum. Lesson plans concentrated heavily on the use of cooperative learning to improve peer relationships. Role playing was used to simulate situations in which students could practice self-control and decision making strategies. Improvement of problem solving skills was addressed through the use of peer mediation techniques. For a complete listing of lesson topics, see Appendix C.

Response journals were used throughout the duration of the project for the purpose of continuous self-assessment of social skills. Topics were selected to address specific

areas of need. In addition, social skills checklists were completed by both the students and the teachers, and the results were discussed at a teacher/student conference. These conferences were held at the conclusion of each quarter.

In October, 1993, students participated in a field trip to Atwood Outdoor Education Center for the purpose of improving team process skills. The Atwood staff led the students through a series of activities which required them to work together in order to achieve a common goal. The students were reminded to encourage each other throughout the activities. At the conclusion of each activity, the students processed their cooperative skills with the guidance of the Atwood staff.

At the beginning of the 1993 school year, a behavior management system was developed in order to motivate students to more frequently exhibit appropriate social skills in the school setting. This began with the identification of potential incentives and the establishment of a classroom management system. The students were involved in the development of the classroom rules and consequences, which were incorporated into the incentive program. Incentives were identified during a brainstorming activity. Completion of assignments and appropriate behavior were rewarded with imitation money. Inappropriate behavior and incomplete assignments were consequenced with the loss of imitation money. Each student was given a copy of this incentive program (Appendix D). Fines were tallied

and records were kept by the classroom aide. Students were afforded many opportunities to spend their money on a variety of incentives. At the conclusion of each quarter, the students participated in an incentive auction.

Presentation and Analysis of Project Results

In order to determine the effectiveness of the intervention, social skills checklists were administered as stated in the objective. During the school year, the proposed interventions were implemented. The results of pre and post intervention checklists are presented in Appendix E and summarized in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6

Responses to Student Self-Assessment Survey Pre and Post Intervention Sept. 1993 and Mar. 1994

	Always		Sometimes		Never	
	Pre%	Post%	Pre%	Post%	Pre%	Post%
Item Number 1	50	18	28	73	22	9
2	28	14	56	68	17	18
3	17	41	56	45	28	14
4	39	32	28	50	33	18
5	28	18	61	36	11	45
6	50	41	44	55	6	5
7	67	36	33	55	0	9
8	39	41	56	55	6	5
9	44	36	39	55	17	9
10	67	41	33	55	0	5
	N=18	N=22	N=18	N=22	N=18	N=22

Table 7

Teacher Responses to Student Assessment
Survey Pre and Post Intervention
Sept. 1993 and Mar. 1994

Item Number	Always		Sometimes		Never	
	Pre%	Post%	Pre%	Post%	Pre%	Post%
1	5	43	68	35	27	22
2	9	26	77	74	14	0
3	32	65	45	26	23	9
4	9	26	50	52	41	22
5	5	26	50	48	45	26
6	14	35	68	65	18	0
7	14	48	32	52	54	0
8	9	26	55	65	36	9
9	23	43	41	35	36	22
10	14	39	50	57	36	4
	N=18	N=22	N=18	N=22	N=18	N=22

A comparison of the data in Tables 6 and 7 indicate that students have more realistic perceptions of their behavior following intervention, as shown by the decrease in discrepancy between teacher and student ratings. Subsequent to intervention, the majority of responses fell in the sometimes appropriate range. Teachers rated overall student behavior higher than pre-intervention, indicating that not only did students' perception of their behavior become more realistic, but their behavior actually improved. This improvement may relate both to the intervention and student maturity.

Table 8

The Instances of Misbehavior by the Self-Contained L.D. Students Pre/Post Intervention Sept. 1993 and Mar. 1994

TYPE OF BEHAVIOR	Pre #	Post #
Tapping on desk	80	0
Noises	23	4
Talking out	104	15
Tardy	13	38
Rudeness	17	13
Interrupting	23	0
Not turning in an assignment	78	84
Fake fighting	8	1
Defiance/Direct Disobedience	11	0
Not on task	15	2
Lacking necessary materials	66	1
Out of seat without permission	12	0

N=22

Table 8 represents the number of inappropriate behaviors occurring within the classroom prior to and following intervention. A comparison of the data indicates that the level of disruptive behavior decreased dramatically. While the instances of tardiness and missing assignments increased, these were not perceived as contributing factors in the disruption of the classroom learning environment. The amount of teaching time spent on discipline was reduced by 65 percent. This decrease surpassed the objective stated in Chapter 4 by 35 percent.

Table 9

The Number of Disciplinary Referrals Received by Self-Contained Learning Disabled Students Oct. 1993 through Mar. 1994

TYPE OF REFERRAL	NUMBER	PERCENT
Insubordination	6	11
Disruptive behavior	19	36
Truancy	14	26
Fighting	9	17
Verbal abuse of staff	0	0
Physical assault of a student	3	6
Gang indicia	0	0
Alcohol/Drugs	0	0
Smoking	0	0
Vandalism	0	0
Physical assault of staff	2	4

N=22

The data shown in Table 9 represent the number of disciplinary referrals received by students during the implementation period. Using the baseline data, the average number of referrals per student was 5.5. Following the intervention, the average number of referrals per student was 2.4. This represents a 56 percent decrease in student referrals. The terminal objective stated that the number of referrals would decrease by 30 percent as a result of the intervention. The terminal objective was surpassed by 26 percent. These data indicate that the interventions were successful in reducing student referrals.

Previously, the data indicated insubordination and disruptive behavior to be the significant areas of concern. As a result of the intervention, referrals for insubordination decreased dramatically, while referrals for

disruptive behavior increased only by two. While truancy increased considerably, it should be noted that three students accounted for the majority of the referrals. Seven of the students in the sample received no referrals.

Table 10 summarizes the data for the number of suspensions students received during the implementation period. It should be noted that of the 22 students in the program, eight received no suspensions. The majority of the in school suspensions were for truancy, while most of the out of school suspensions were for fighting. Previously the suspensions represented only five students. Following intervention, 14 students received suspensions, with six of these students earning only one suspension.

Table 10

The Number of Suspensions Received by Self-Contained LD Students Oct. 1993 to Mar. 1994

TYPE OF SUSPENSION	NUMBER
In classroom	3
In school	38
Out of school	7

N=22

The terminal objective required that the number of in school suspensions would decrease by 20 percent, and the number of out of school suspensions would decrease by 30 percent. The actual decreases exceeded the objective. The number of in school suspensions decreased by 30 percent, and the number of out of school suspensions decreased by 85

percent. These data indicate that the interventions were successful in reducing the number of suspensions.

Chapter 6

DECISIONS ON THE FUTURE

The Solution Strategy

The data indicate that the behavior intervention program should be continued. However, various components of the program should be refined. The incentive plan requires clarification to assure greater consistency of behavior expectations among the implementors. In addition, although the amount of teacher time spent redirecting student behavior decreased as projected, the implementation of the incentive plan required an inordinate amount of classroom time. Classroom aides were used to record data and assess fines in order to relieve teachers of total responsibility for implementation. The use of a computerized record-keeping system would further alleviate this problem.

The method of disbursement of incentive money should be changed to an account system, because during the course of project implementation some students stole money from other students.

An unexpected result of the intervention was development of students' concern for each other. This was exhibited by students paying fines for students who had no money and would have to serve lunch detention as a consequence. This was most interesting as students chose to help those in need, not just those who were their friends. As a result, this display of empathy appears to have generalized to other situations.

Additional Applications

This project would lend itself directly to the instruction of mathematics focusing specifically on money skills such as banking, budgeting, comparison shopping, and calculator skills.

The program would be appropriate for use in a self-contained behavior disordered classroom. Students in this type of educational setting often benefit from immediate reinforcement and consequences for behavior.

A collaborative effort between parents and teachers could result in improvement of students' behavior in the home environment. Parents could be provided social skills activities and an extension of the incentive program to be used at home. This component would in turn enhance teacher/parent communication.

Dissemination of Data and Recommendations

In addition to presentation of results at a special education department meeting within the building, the results of this intervention should be shared with the district supervisor. Copies of the project should be made available upon request through the special education department.

The researchers recommend that future implementors incorporate incentives into their yearly budget. The possibility of donated incentives should be pursued to relieve the implementors of the financial burden.

However, incentives alone will not guarantee the success of the project. The skills and commitment of future implementors are critical to a positive outcome.

We would not recommend the use of this incentive program in regular education classes because of the financial and time constraints involved. It would not be feasible to effectively implement this project in a classroom with more than 15 students, especially without a classroom aide. However, the social skills curriculum could be effectively integrated in a regular education classroom.

Knowledge of social skills is extremely important for young people to be successful. Unfortunately, many are not acquiring these skills in the home. Therefore, they need to be addressed in the school setting. Too often, teachers tend to focus solely on the teaching of academic skills in order to cover required curriculum. Many teachers feel they do not have time, nor is it their responsiblity, to instruct students on the proper use of social skills. We must support and encourage fellow educators in their efforts to integrate social skills training into their existing curriculum. Teachers will discover that every minute spent teaching students proper social skills will make a critical difference in their classroom environment.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Name: _____

SELF-ASSESSMENT: SOCIAL SKILLS

	Always	Sometimes	Never
1. I can identify and name my feelings.			
2. I use appropriate language with others.			
3. I avoid physical aggression toward others.			
4. I deal positively with my frustration.			
5. I verbalize my feelings when appropriate.			
6. I cooperate with authority figures.			
7. I work cooperatively in groups.			
8. I am responsible for my assignments and materials.			
9. I accept and assume responsibility for my behavior.			
10. I maintain appropriate behavior in unstructured settings (eg., cafeteria, hallway, etc.).			

The social skill I need to work on right away is _____

_____ because _____.

To improve this skill, I will need to _____

_____.

Appendix B

Student Name: _____

Teacher Name: _____

TEACHER ASSESSMENT: SOCIAL SKILLS

	Always	Sometimes	Never
1. Student can identify and name feelings.			
2. Student uses appropriate language with others.			
3. Student avoids physical aggression with others.			
4. Student deals with frustration positively.			
5. Student verbalizes feelings when appropriate.			
6. Student is cooperative with authority figures.			
7. Student works cooperatively in a group.			
8. Student is responsible for assignments and materials.			
9. Student accepts and assumes responsibility for behavior.			
10. Student maintains appropriate behavior in unstructure settings.			

* What social skill, if any, needs immediate attention?

Appendix C

LESSON PLAN TOPICS

Verbal skills

Non-verbal communication skills

Improving self-esteem

Assertiveness

Cooperative learning

Listening skills

Conflict resolution

Realistic self-appraisal

Identification of feelings

Goal setting

Organizational skills

Maintaining interpersonal relationships

Developing responsibility

Encouraging others

Self-reflective journal writing

Trust building activities

Decision making skills

Anticipating consequences

Increasing self-control

Prejudice and stereotyping

Values clarification

Appendix D

MONEY MONEY MONEY MONEY

YOU CAN EARN MONEY!!!

$30 for an "A" on an assignment the first time it's turned in

$20 for a "B" on an assignment the first time it's turned in

$10 for a "C" on an assignment the first time it's turned in

$50 for perfect attendance for week - NO TARDIES

$10 for a day with no fines

$50 per person for a class with no fines for the week

YOU MAY BUY

$1500 for free time for the class (no money, no free time)

$500 to buy out of an assignment

$200 for extra hall pass (BR, library, drink, subject to teacher approval)

$200 to draw when your assignment is completed

$200 to sit wherever for the day (by teacher, by friends)

$200 to bring $$ for pop in class (6th hour only)

$100 to be teacher for 1 class

$500 to bring $$ for Mc Donald's

$700 to sleep in class ($500 for assign., $200 to sleep)

$50 refundable collateral

$500 to buy a movie once per month

$200 to buy popcorn during the movie

Progress report and report card times
$200 to buy 1 percentage point
$400 to buy 3 percentage points

Star Pizza Chart--100 squares--Earn a square for every class in which no students have earned a fine--Can be earned in both Mrs. Green's and Mrs. Gilbert's classes--When charts in both rooms are filled: PIZZA!!

Every other Friday is Buy Day--There will be items you may buy with your money.

END OF THE QUARTER AUCTION

Minimum bids on some items

Some items available for inspection before the auction

FINES

$20 for tapping on desk, floor, etc.

$20 for noises (hum, whistle, etc.)

$20 for talking out

$10 for first tardy, $10 for each additional tardy

$100 for running

$100 for rudeness to anyone, arguing

$100 for interrupting

$20 for jacket in room

$100 for not turning in assignment

$200 for fake fighting ("We was only playin'")

$500 per class period for not cooperating with a substitute

$300 for defiance or direct disobedience

$100 for not paying attention or not working

$50 for not having materials when class starts (Borrow before the bell, if necessary!)

$50 for things left in room

$50 for being out of your seat without permission

$100 for touching other people's things without permission

IF YOU RUN OUT OF MONEY

15 minute lunch detention until you pay your fines

If you are fined 3 times in any one class period, you will receive a statement to copy and return with parent signature.

Three (3) fines for disruptive behavior in 1 class period will earn the student an in-class suspension and written assignment; parent will be called

New fines and new ways to earn money may be added as needed.

Appendix E

Responses to Student Self-Assessment
Survey Pre and Post Intervention
Sept. 1993 and Mar. 1994

		Always		Sometimes		Never	
		Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Item Number	1	9	4	5	16	4	2
	2	5	3	10	15	3	4
	3	3	9	10	10	5	3
	4	7	7	5	11	6	4
	5	5	4	11	8	2	10
	6	9	9	8	12	1	1
	7	12	8	6	12	0	2
	8	7	9	10	12	1	1
	9	8	8	7	12	3	2
	10	12	9	6	12	0	1
		N=18	N=22	N=18	N=22	N=18	N=22